

'Variety in unity' describes reports of synod delegates

By John Thavis

Vatican City (NC) — There was far more emphasis on the successes of the Second Vatican Council in the reports of delegates to the Nov. 24-Dec. 8 extraordinary synod, than on disappointments following in the council's wake.

At the end of the two-week event, the delegates gave the council a clear and forceful endorsement.

In a message to Catholics, the bishops unanimously expressed their "full adherence to the council," and described it as a "wellspring" for the future of the church.

"We do not fix upon the errors, confusions and defects which, because of sin and human weakness, have been the occasion of suffering in the midst of the people of God," the bishops said.

That was the tone of the more than 120 individual statements and group reports coming out of the meeting.

Pope John Paul II, who called the synod to assess the council's results 20 years after its close, said the experience was one of "variety in unity." After listening to nearly all the synod participants, he thanked them for "freely expressing their own thoughts," and said the meeting was an example of real collegiality.

As always, he accepted the bishops' advisory report at the synod's conclusion. But this time, the pope agreed that the report be made public — an apparent sign of the intense interest the synod has aroused among people worldwide.

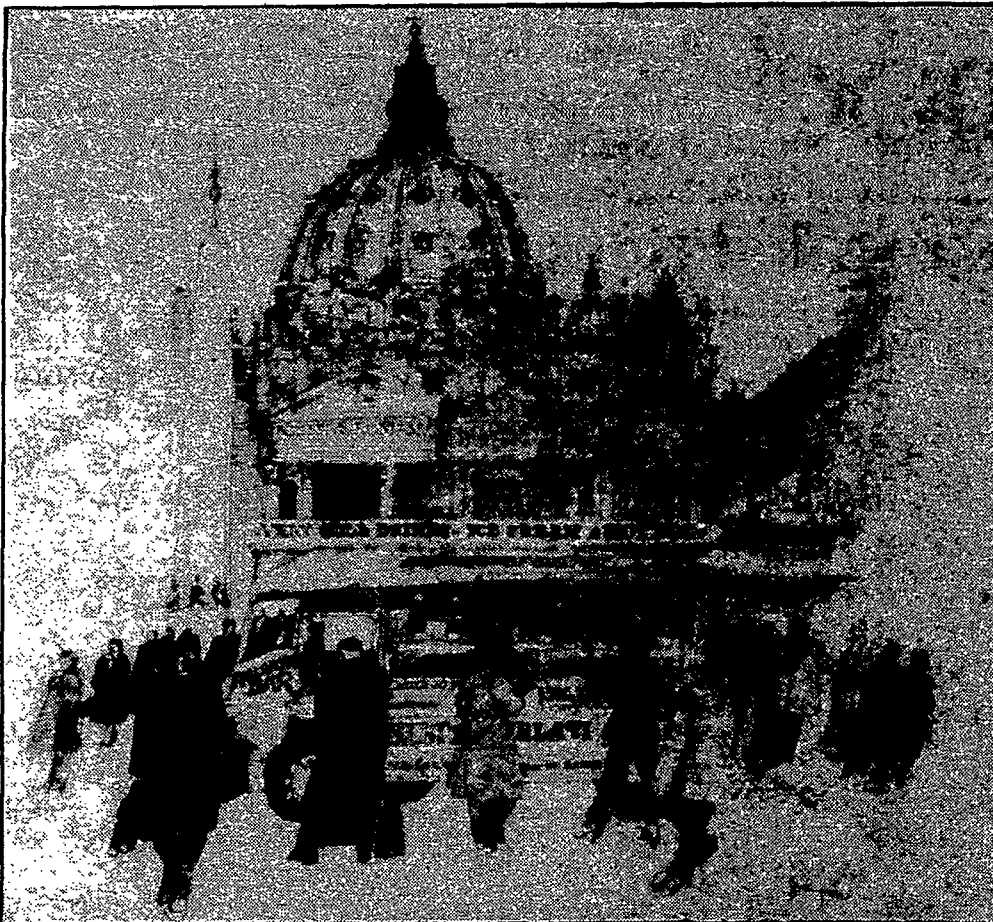
Beyond the overall conclusion that the council was a "gift of God," the meeting of approximately 160 participants focused on a few key issues:

- The authority of local churches, bishops' conferences and the Roman Curia.

- The need to emphasize spirituality among individual Catholics and in the understanding of the church itself.

- The idea of a worldwide catechism or compendium of church teaching, both to promote the council and clear up ambiguities on moral questions.

On two of the issues, U.S. participants were major protagonists in the synod debate. Bishop James W. Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, president of the National Conference



Following a morning session of the extraordinary Synod of Bishops, participants take a lunch break, many returning to their hotels to do some study for the afternoon session. (NC drawing by Franklin McMahon)

of Catholic Bishops, asked for recognition of the value of bishops' conferences and for a study of their teaching authority. Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston proposed drawing up a catechism based on the council.

The synod endorsed both ideas.

During the first week of the synod's work — composed of individual speeches with eight-minute time limits — several bishops urged that local churches be given more authority in local matters, with less interference from the church's central administrative offices.

Retired Bishop John W. Gran of Oslo, Norway, head of the Scandinavian bishops' conference, said there was a "return to the mentality that diocesan bishops are representatives of Rome, rather than administrators with their own rights."

Other calls for decentralized church authority came from representatives of the Antilles, Indonesia, Bolivia, Brazil, Ethiopia, Chad and Gambia. Several others urged greater collaboration between the Curia and local bishops.

Archbishop Denis Hurley, head of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, called for a "clearer recognition of the principle of subsidiarity" — the respect for the competence of each church jurisdiction. In even minor matters, he said, trust in local churches "is not always in evidence."

A number of African and Asian bishops, praising the adaption their young churches have made to local cultures, asked the Vatican to encourage such inculturation and to show greater confidence in local churches.

Most of the bishops called for a better functioning of collegiality, the shared authority of bishops which was strongly affirmed by Vatican II.

Several, including Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger of Paris, said papal primacy should be seen as the unifying factor among bishops.

Some warned that it damaged church unity to speak about separate jurisdictions of pope and bishops.

Archbishop Maxim Hermaniuk of Winnipeg, Manitoba, head of Canada's Ukrainian Catholics, proposed a permanent synod with legislative powers. The idea was dropped during group discussions in the synod's second week.

A theme that drew major attention was the need to accentuate spiritual life. Several of the synod's discussion groups called for a re-emphasis of the sacred in the lives of individual Catholics and of the institutional church.

In their end-of-synod message, the bishops further stressed this point. "The church cannot renew herself without more profoundly rooting this spiritual note of mystery in the hearts of Christians," it said.

"It is thus necessary to understand the profound reality of the church, and consequently to avoid false sociological or political interpretations of the nature of the church," it said.

East German Cardinal Joachim Meisner, bishop of Berlin, told the synod that "the church as a mystery and not as an institution is yearned for by many people who feel oppressed" in today's "mass society."

Several synod reports urged a return to
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